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ABSTRACT

This handbook accompanies a videotape that shows teenagers stressing community involvement, motivation, and the rewards of community action. The booklet is to assist agencies and schools in developing coalitions for youth engaged in community service, to help build better citizens and healthier communities. The booklet is divided into: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Why Youth Allies Are Key"; (3) "Youth Ally Profile: Evelyn Juliussen, Youth Worker"; (4) "Youth Ally Profile: Jean Burkhart, County Commissioner"; (5) "Voices of Wisdom: Principles of Best Practice"; (6) "Youth Ally Profile: Robert Woolfolk, Pastor"; (7) "Youth Ally Profile: Najma Mazy'at, Youth Engaged in Service Ambassador"; (8) "Building Relationships with Youth: Sample Activities"; (9) "Youth Ally Profile: Yvette Gomez, Community Arts Outreach Coordinator"; (10) "Youth Ally Profile: Romona Safree, First Grade Teacher"; and (11) "Resources." (EH)

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Saren Eyre

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Dear Ally:

Since 1990, thousands of organizations and communities have used the *Today's Heroes* video to inspire young people to take action in their communities. These youth have risen to the call, joining with others of all ages to address the serious issues that face every neighborhood in this country.

In the video, four teenagers describe their community involvement, motivation, and rewards of community action. Their adult "allies" — teachers, parents, staff of community organizations — discuss their roles in helping the teenagers turn their visions into reality.

The Hitachi Foundation is pleased to join with The Points of Light Foundation and the National Youth Leadership Council to present this series of resource guides to help you make the best use of *Today's Heroes*.

These guides — designed for youth leaders, K-12 and college educators, and community leaders — help young people translate inspiration into effective action, through training, preparation, reflection, and celebration of their community involvement.

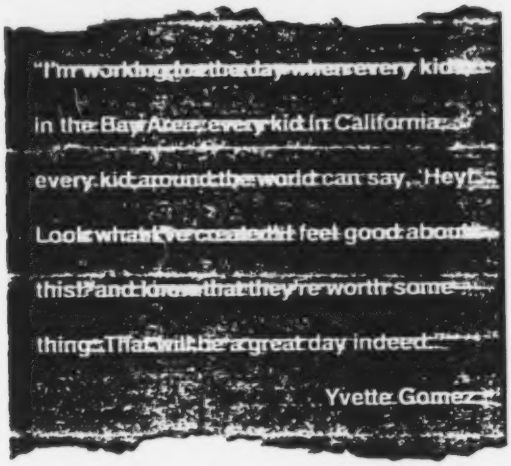
We hope you find these materials useful, and we welcome your comments on their impact and use in your efforts.

Thank you for your commitment to youth and to healthy communities.

Sincerely,

Elliot L. Richardson
Chairman
The Hitachi Foundation

INTRODUCTION


"I'm working for the day when every kid in the Bay Area, every kid in California, every kid around the world can say, 'Hey! Look what I've created! I feel good about this!' and know that they're worth something. That will be a great day indeed."
Yvette Gomez

It has been said that any long journey begins with a single step. Likewise, a long story begins with the first word. Right here, right now, what is the first word of a teacher in Lansing, Michigan who provides opportunities for her students to grow and learn and give back to their community? What is the first word of a cultural activist working with his brothers and sisters in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the largest concentration of urban Native Americans in the country? What is the first word of a revolutionary pastor turned activist who fights for the rights of young people every day on the streets of Denver, Colorado?

The word is hope. The word is pain. The word is effort, again and again, to do what it takes to create a safe passage to the future for young people and our communities. As youth allies, we want our young people to become Today's Heroes. Like elementary teacher Romona Safree of Minnesota, we are youth advocates, and this advocacy goes beyond our jobs. "It's being committed to helping kids feel good about themselves, and addressing issues that get in the way of their positive development," says Romona. "Whatever the child needs, we try to make it happen. Whether they are experiencing academic difficulties or economic hardships, its our responsibility to find services to help them."

Like Romona, we work hard to find and create empowering experiences for the young people with whom we work. And as we work tirelessly on behalf of others, what happens to us—the advocates, allies, confidants, friends, teachers, social workers, counselors, mentors, and elders? What happens to the dreams we are afraid to speak, the fears we are afraid to name, the visions that we cannot hold on to? What happens when we go at top speed to an unnamed destination, directing traffic but not putting on the brakes?

What happens is that we crash. And when a pillar of the community crashes, there are consequences larger than ourselves. Where do we go to discuss visions, to strategize about new possibilities, to mourn the loss of much needed programming in our communities and schools? Hopefully, we turn to each other. Hopefully, we recognize our efforts and forgive ourselves when things don't go as planned. And hopefully, we muster the energy to try again.

Who This Book Is For

Pivotal Force: The Power of Youth Allies is aimed at developing the resources and skills of educators, agencies and others who work with youth in a variety of settings. The material for this booklet was compiled from the experiences of youth allies across the country whose work as teachers, youth workers, counselors, and advocates touches the lives of young people every day. The profiles of youth allies represented here are but a fraction of the many voices, thoughts, and experiences heard and felt during this project. Many thanks to the generosity of those who shared their wisdom so that other youth allies may feel a sense of camaraderie and understanding.

This guide explores the concept of an ally; examines the rationale behind adult-youth partnerships in community building; highlights principles of best practice, as extracted from the lives of youth allies around the country; and provides sample activities you can use to help build relationships with youth.

This guide is intended to be a resource for adults who work with youth directly or indirectly in school or community settings. Just like Beth Sullivan of

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Lansing, Michigan who was featured in the *Today's Heroes* video, adults provide opportunities for young people to grow, learn, and give back to their communities. Just like her, as you serve as an ally for youth and their needs, you provide the much needed link between individual students and community organizations. And because of Beth's openness, insight, and commitment as a youth ally, Tony Winnicker had more opportunities to grow beyond success in school. "Students gain a sense of the universal needs of all people," says Beth of Tony's community service with the homeless. "We all need love, understanding, support and friendship. When people reach out, nothing is insolvable."

Whether you are a teacher like Beth, or a counselor, community educator, volunteer, principal, pastor, community activist, parent, artist, mentor, tutor, or community elder, you serve as a role model, confidant, and advocate for young people. You are a youth ally. And as such, you impact the lives of the young people around you providing a safe, nurturing space for them to think, question, and be themselves. And perhaps, as you struggle to meet their needs, your needs and questions go unanswered, your fears unrecognized.

As youth allies, we need a safe place to go, too. We need to have questions answered, fears recognized, and concerns validated. *Pivotal Force: The Power of Youth Allies* is intended to provide that safe space for adults who struggle to provide safety for young people everyday. Within these pages, you can question, explore, wonder, create, envision, expand, re-negotiate, and learn. It is hoped that by recognizing the important role adults play in the development of young people we can begin to address our needs as well and move forward to make all of our dreams a reality.

How To Use This Book

Pivotal Force: The Power of Youth Allies begins with a discussion of what youth allies are and why they are important, and ends with some practical how-to's and resources for program development. *Pivotal Force* provides a variety of access points. Use it to lay some groundwork for change, or to solidify the ground you have already walked. In any case, wherever you are on your journey, let it help you evaluate and improve your programs, recognize your strengths and liberate your visions.

- Use *Pivotal Force* as a source of programmatic support. Go to the section on sample activities and try them out.
- Use it as a source of emotional support. read the "Youth Ally Profiles" about other youth allies—their struggles, their accomplishments, their visions—and gather strength to try some of your ideas.
- Use it to advocate for programming. read the section "Rationale: Relationships are Key" and make a case with your community for a new mentorship program, or make a case with your board of directors for an expanded youth service program.
- Use it to enhance your social studies curriculum. read the profiles and watch the *Today's Heroes* video. Facilitate a discussion with your students about social change, community service, examples from history where allies were key, or about times when they have been an ally to someone and made a difference in that role.

There are as many different ways to use *Pivotal Force* as there are youth allies. Read it from beginning to end, or read one section that is most relevant to your needs. Wherever and however you use it, do not keep it to yourself. Share it! Like the best learning, it expands with dialogue and application to real life.

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WHY **YOUTH ALLIES** ARE KEY

> "Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power."
>
> Martin Luther King, Jr.

Relationships are key to developing programs that meet the needs of the youth involved, the community in general, and your needs as a youth ally. Like youth worker Evelyn Juliussen in Alaska, or elementary teacher Romona Safree in Minnesota, many youth allies stated that relationship-building was the most gratifying and challenging aspect of their work. "I want them to have a friend in me as well as a mentor, like I had when I was growing up...I've kept up with a lot of students, and now I'm seeing their younger brothers and sisters coming up," says Evelyn, whose ethic of consistency and commitment are evident in her actions. These sentiments are echoed by Romona as well, whose work as an ally reaches beyond the classroom walls. "Every kid in our school has teachers' phone numbers, and they know they are cared about, in and out of school."

A youth ally is necessary as someone who can empathize with other people, especially in contested situations where understanding and intervention on behalf of a young person will make the difference between active participation or alienation. In a society where organizational relationships have become more important than interpersonal relationships, a youth ally becomes important to bridge the gap between people and institutions, between ideas and reality. Take for instance the experiences of youth ally Najma Nazy'at in Massachusetts, who finds herself intervening quite often. "When I'm advocating for a corps member, I listen to their experiences and perspectives," says Najma. "At the same time, I try to give them information, try to fill in the missing pieces that are keeping them from understanding how to affect the system, and subsequently, their situation." In this way, Najma plays a crucial role as a youth ally by providing that link between youth and systems and paving the way to new strategies and solutions.

You as a youth ally are creating harmony between institutions and individuals, between old programs and new approaches. You create the empathy needed to introduce young people to community service and introduce the community to the idea of youth as resources. When the community empathizes with youth, and vice-versa then a youth ally can make inroads and begin to suggest programs to meet the needs of all involved. Youth ally Robert Woolfolk in Colorado has actualized this concept as Pastor of Agape Christian Church. As his community struggled with intergenerational misunderstandings, Robert saw a need for everyone to feel like they were part of the solution, not the problem. In response, Robert developed an intergenerational tutoring program for ele-

Questions To Ask In Developing A Rationale For Youth Allies

- How does the concept of youth ally fit into the worlds of youth development and youth service, community service, community development and social change?
- Why are youth allies necessary and important?
- What is their purpose?
- How can we advocate for or justify a youth ally program that supports adults in advocating for youth? How can we justify new projects or positions within our agencies and schools? When, where and in what situations are youth allies essential?

mentary students where teenagers serve as tutors and elders serve as mentors. "Everyone has a role to play, and when they work together, they learn to understand and respect each other," says Robert.

Oftentimes, youth voice their disapproval and disappointment of programs without recognizing that solutions are possible. As a catalyst for change, a youth ally can articulate an objective view of problems, possibilities, and solutions. Thus youth learn to use their voice to build a new foundation, not simply destroy what exists.

To be effective in carrying out projects and programs, youth allies must understand the context of their work, be clear and articulate about their goals, and learn the necessary social skills. These skills often include (but are not limited to) recruiting and training youth members, conflict resolution, and leading reflection activities. When you use these skills to advocate for youth, you help them affect the systems that are in power so that they are better able to address their needs. "Development and empowerment are foundations on which to build youth power so they can use their voices effectively," says Najma. "As youth allies we need to hear them, help them, point them in the right direction."

As youth allies, leaders of community organizations walk a thin line. Finding the balance between order and flexibility can be difficult. While little can be accomplished without some degree of order and coordination, too much order leads to inflexible programming, hierarchical leadership models, and inaccessible institutions. This bureaucratization is often found in non-participatory, non-democratic organizations.

These organizations, however, tend to lose the faith of youth with whom they work and of the participants in their programs, who may end up feeling like numbers as opposed to human beings. One of your roles as a youth ally, therefore, is to guard against this and to lead the organization to democratic participation by youth, community members, and community agency personnel on all levels. "Quality interactions should be our goal, not quantity-based programming," says Evelyn, who was challenged with this mode of operation while working as a recruiter for a major university.

Youth allies also act to monitor specific programs. Too often, the rationale used to develop and justify new programming is based on generalized data gathered from past programs, not from current data collected from community members about their present needs and perspectives. Formal evaluation procedures also may or may not fit with what actually took place. A youth ally, as a participant/observer managing the program, learns what and how well a program is doing while it is actually underway. Monitoring programs involves collecting basic information as it happens and interacting informally with participants. The information is then instantly useful and can be applied to improve the relationships, program quality, and project outcome while the project is underway. The participants, then, are the direct beneficiaries of the work of the youth ally as the relevance of the program to their lives increases with every new evaluation.

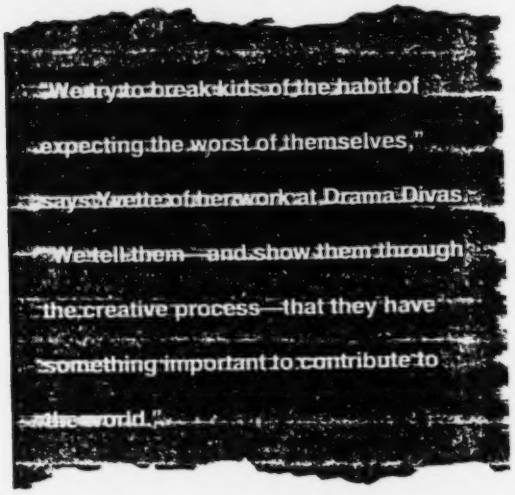
Depending on what youth members thought a particular project was to accomplish, it could be seen as either a success of failure. If a program coordinator convinces the youth to lower their expectations in the beginning, then she/he seems successful. Youth who

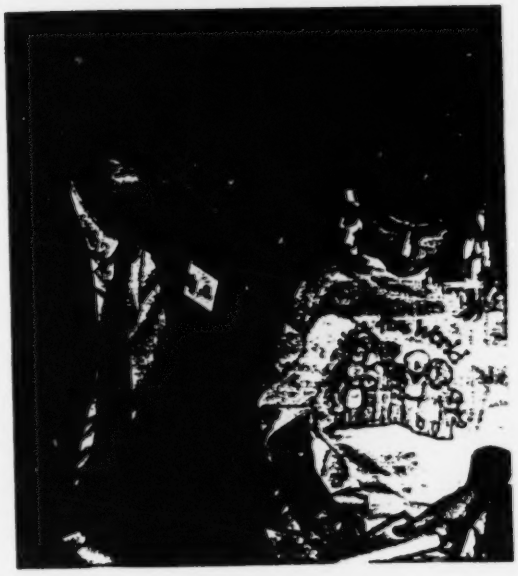
See *Today's Heroes in the Community* for more information on agencies engaging youth.

might have pushed the limitations of the system are placated—and yet real conditions have not been improved. By taking a more proactive approach, the program coordinator who is allied with youth will try to harness their complaints, frustrations—in short, all of their energy—into impacting the program and the community in a positive way. When the complainer in a group is assisted in finding pro-social ways to express their visions, then the youth ally has successfully challenged the youth and their institution to engage each other; indeed, to empathize and act in concert.

Without "rediscovering the wheel" to solve each problem, youth allies help individuals—both youth and adults, institutions, specific programs and whole departments—become cooperative, caring, empathetic partners who use their skills and ideas to improve their surroundings. And when this trust is built, youth allies have planted a much needed seed for change.

This is why your work is so important. As a youth ally, you create meaningful experiences for youth and defend their right to these experiences. You create opportunities where none existed before and challenge the assumption that youth are unproductive members of society. Like youth ally Yvette Gomez in California, who works with youth through theater, we


"We try to break kids of the habit of
expecting the worst of themselves,"
says Yvette of her work at Drama Divas.
"We tell them—and show them through
the creative process—that they have
something important to contribute to
the world."



must find ways to broaden the experiences of young people. "We try to break kids of the habit of expecting the worst of themselves," says Yvette of her work at Drama Divas. "We tell them—and show them through the creative process—that they have something important to contribute to the world."

Your work is important because of the world it opens up—challenging preconceived notions, providing opportunities, and creating new and respectful ways to relate. You may not be able to witness firsthand the growth of all the seeds that you have planted, but you will be able to feel the ground shake beneath you as the first roots of change take hold. Every time youth produce something, every time they are affirmed, every time they feel good about a situation they have affected, you know your work is working. Like Yvette says of her work, "I'm looking forward to the day when every kid in the Bay Area, every kid in California, every kid around the world can say, 'Hey! Look at what I've created! I feel good about this!' That will be a great day indeed."

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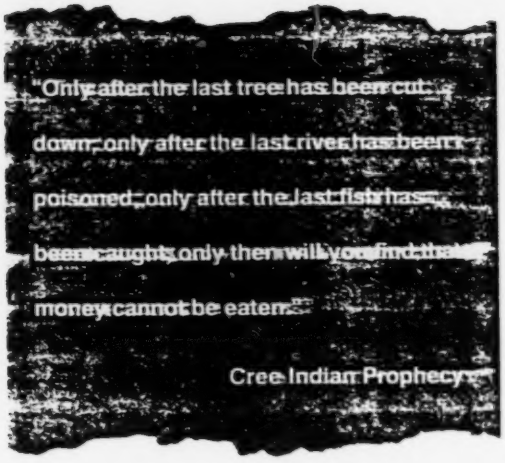
EVELYN JULIUSSEN, YOUTH WORKER


"Only after the last tree has been cut
down, only after the last river has been
poisoned, only after the last fish has
been caught, only then will you find that
money cannot be eaten."
Cree Indian Prophecy

When Evelyn Juliussen was growing up in Alaska, she knew she wanted to work with kids, to give them lots of encouragement and support. A Native Alaskan from the Aleut Tribe, Evelyn has worked extensively in her community to empower younger members of her tribe and the general community to give them a sense of power and hope. "In my work I try to have a common level with the young people I work with," she says. "I want them to have a friend in me as well as a mentor, like I had when I was growing up."

Evelyn has dealt daily with the intersection between friendship and authority — a line that befuddles many youth workers. Whether acting as a supervisor for high school students on campus, as a mentor to young people at home, or as the director of the Native American Science and Engineering Society Camp, she has been able to nurture relationships that walk this line.

Working in the nonprofit field, Evelyn is savvy about how to interact with colleagues. Wanting to work with people, not against people, she does not engage in power struggles over programmatic control. "I like to come into a program and find out what goals and procedures have been established already," she says. "I ask questions like, 'who founded the program, what was their vision, how are the present staff trying to accomplish this, what are the standards of operation?' After I find this out, I then ask what I can add to the mix, and decide if I can meet my goals by working with that particular program."

With as much professional sensitivity as she brings to work situations, Evelyn expects just as much cultural awareness from her colleagues and peers. As a Native Alaskan, she has experienced a great deal of what she calls "mistaken identity." "People on the mainland have a perception that Native Alaskan is the same as Native American, and it's not," says Evelyn, who is often asked to speak at high schools on Native American culture. "I can't teach anyone's culture but my own."

Through these experiences, Evelyn has learned to change her own behavior as a youth ally. She has learned to incorporate a more appropriate response into her own work: "I always, always ask someone from that culture to speak, and I use my position to get them a space in which to do that. I feel this is really important for young people, who desperately need to learn cultural truths in this age of intolerance."

As a youth worker, Evelyn knows young people value her consistency in their lives. Relationships, both professional and personal, revolve around the notion of consistency, and when this is not there, programs suffer.

Consistency and commitment. These are two principles of practice that guide Evelyn in her work. "You can't just enter a kid's life and leave the next day if you want to have an impact," she says, reflecting on the role models she has had in her life. "They never gave up on me. They just kept asking the right questions. I never got the sense that my mentor would abandon me when I got into a jam."

As part of her commitment to the health of young people in her community and her desire to acknowledge the effort adults put into her as a child, Evelyn repays her mentors by being a mentor herself. "I have kept up with a lot of students, and now I'm seeing their younger brothers and sisters coming up, and that's very gratifying," she says. "I always leave my address and phone numbers with students, saying 'Call me anytime you need something,' because this is what was done for me."

YOUTH ALLY PROFILE
JEAN BURKHART, COUNTY COMMISSIONER

> "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than a sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."
>
> Martin Luther King, Jr.

Jean Burkhart is a friend, advocate, and "quasi-parent" to young people in her hometown as well as across the nation. She describes the parameters of her work on three levels. In her role as a public official, she serves as a County Commissioner in the rural Minnesota community where she grew up, mediating conflicts, managing resources, and advocating for the rights of community members, especially young people. In her national role, she works with the Corporation for National Service—among other agencies—as an independent consultant and program developer. And in her volunteer time, she works closely with the young people in her community—having ice skating parties at her house, serving as a mentor, and generally providing an open ear and a big heart to kids in need.

Noting that her connection with youth falls in more than one arena, Jean is not hard pressed to say which has the most impact on her. "It's in my home town that I have one-on-one, personal time with kids," she says. "Next weekend thirty kids are coming to my house to skate, and I'm really excited to hang out with them!"

While recognizing the emotional impact that personal contact with kids in her hometown has on her, Jean also acknowledges the necessity to advocate for youth on the county, state, and national level. "There is a real need for us to educate our peers on what it means to grow up today," she says. "For example, we need to provide services, such as shelter, health care and job counseling to young women who are pregnant, whether we agree with the pregnancy or not. If we are not allied with the young people, then more conservative policies and practices end up governing their lives, only because there is such a generation gap between some policy makers and youth today."

Jean's fluid approach to her work and her ability to work in multiple settings has helped her move in many circles at once. This fluidity has also allowed her to develop a working definition of a youth ally that has changed over time especially in light of her work as a public official. She used to think the notion of an ally implied pledges of forever, of being an ally no matter what. This notion was based on a personal commitment, a personal relationship.

"For example, you can be an "omni-present ally" with relatives, serving as an extension of parents, if you will. My nieces recognize me as an ally/quasi-parent because my voice patterns are the same as their mother's. Because we are sisters, we have similar values and outlooks. In this way, my nieces experience me the way they experience their parents, very personally."

Now that she has experienced the notion of an ally from the vantage point of a public official, Jean believes that allies and allegiances shift based on need and the issue being decided upon. In the public arena, being an ally is based on a set of definitions and principles, not personal relationships. As a county commissioner, she serves as a "policy ally," a "removed ally," often serving as the voice for young people, making decisions for people who are eighteen years old and younger. "I was elected to make decisions for the kids of my peers, for teen parents, for young women. They are always present in my mind; I advocate for them constantly."

As a person working away from her home, namely in Washington, D.C., Jean serves as a "connector," as a strong voice for rural interests and real people. "Often we make decisions and policies that are going to play themselves out in communities differently than we expected they would. I try to remind other policymakers of this, and try to get them to reflect on the implications of their programming," Jean says.

What is to be made of the shift from an "ally for-

ever" to "positional ally?" Jean believes her experience serving in her hometown has made her accountable to her actions and beliefs. "When you work in the place where you grew up, you're dealing with years of prejudice and attitudes. You are held to your convictions, you are held accountable." It is hard to maintain that accountability on a large scale—the feeling that the whole community will be in your face if you make a decision that doesn't benefit them.

Jean feels that she and her peers do their best work when they are confident in the rest of their lives. "As adults, we don't need to be around kids all the time. In fact, not being around them all the time makes you a better advocate!" she laughs. "But seriously, we have lives, we need to do different things to rejuvenate ourselves. We need to live lives that young people can look at and model so that they have an idea that things are possible."

The way Jean has approached her work with young people has changed. "Now," she says, "I can say to young people, 'I don't agree with you,' or 'No, I'm not going to do that because I don't like how you asked me. So think about it and try again." Aligning yourself with someone simply because they are young is disingenuous, she concludes. Healthy disagreement can be good; it provides an opportunity for young people to learn.

Jean acknowledges there are several factors contributing to multi-generational misunderstandings. In Southern Minnesota, there is a curious pride that adults, parents and teachers alike have in young people. "We give them very mixed messages here," she says. "We have a fierce pride in them up until the time they graduate from high school. Then, all of the sudden, we treat them like outsiders. If they leave their hometown, it's very difficult to come back. If they go away and come back, say after a year of college, then they have failed. The message then becomes one of intense fear on the part of adults for the young people in the community. To stay is to not be successful, yet to leave is to be absent, never to be counted as part of the community."

Rural areas, in this way, sometimes face a vacuum of leadership. Of 90 employees at the high school in Jean's home town, only two went to that school and grew up in the community. Ramifications? "Everyone is kept at arms length and it's almost impossible to build a sense of community," Jean says.

What does this situation demand of a youth ally? "Enormous patience!" Jean laughs. "You end up listening to things that are otherwise intolerable, but you do, because it will benefit young people in the end."

So what does Jean get back from working in her hometown, given the difficulties, the attitudes, the vacuum in leadership? "Well," she muses, "I get a strong local voice about what is true and not true. I can use this voice in my work as a county commissioner, and at the national level as well. I get a greater sense of humility, you know? I mean, it's easy to talk change, and it's hard to make it happen. I have a greater appreciation of that now, and it comes from working here, at home, among people who are so different from me, but at the same time, exactly the same."

Jean hopes that what she gives to young people is exactly what she needed when she was their age—an understanding that it is possible to lead your life in many, many ways. "No one told me 'You have a role to play, and you are valued.' I want to expose kids to the things I had to wait until I was eighteen to experience. Why should this be so? Embrace life, that's what I say!"

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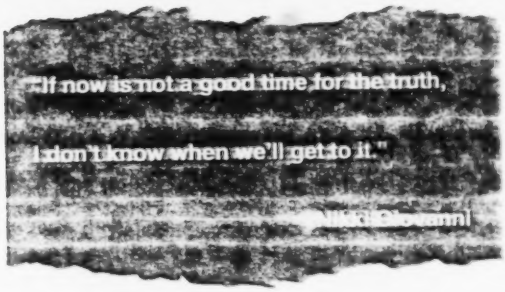

Youth allies in various arenas have principles by which they live (and survive) as they advocate for youth in policy settings, religious communities, schools, neighborhoods, youth centers, and service corps. What follows is a sampling of some tried and true principles, taken from interviews of youth allies from a variety of backgrounds, all of whom share a commitment to building respectful relationships with young people.

Youth allies in policymaking say:

Ask yourself why you do what you do.

Be good to yourself—take time to develop yourself so that you lead by example.

Take healthy breaks away from youth.

Develop your own perspectives on issues.

Be progressive, speak out! " If we are not allied with young people, then more conservative policies and practices end up governing their lives, only because their is such a generation gap between most policymakers and youth today," says Jean Burkhart.

Youth allies in education say:

Listen to students without judgment.

Acknowledge that learning is affected by advocating for not only intellectual growth, but for the health of the whole child.

If you cannot help, try not to hurt.

Kids should be seen AND heard.

Give kids room to make mistakes. "We want kids to grow up to be independent thinkers, so we give them room to make mistakes," says Romona Safree. "When they do, we give them a way out, and tools to improve."

Youth allies in the community service field say:

Work to provide needed information in the places where young people lack access to such information.

Provide a space for real feelings by listening to young people's experiences.

Ask questions to stimulate critical thinking. By showing young people how to be critical observers and giving them information on which to act, allies provide the missing link between thinking and doing. "It takes more than shovels to clean a dump site," says Najma Nazy'at. "It takes statistics, too."

Recognize the dual loyalty you have to your program and to young people.

Teach young people to interact with systems. "That's the key to effective advocacy—teaching young people to interact with systems," says Najma. "That's the role of a youth ally. We have to hook young people up with adults who have decision-making responsibility. And we need to teach them how to follow up, be diligent. That's how change happens."

Youth allies from the faith community say:

Develop community programs that are multi-dimensional and address educational, economic, spiritual and social needs. "We try to minister to the whole person, addressing people's needs so that they can take care of themselves, be self-sufficient," says Robert Woolfolk.

- Always incorporate the basic teachings of integrity, discipline and responsibility into your programming.
- Build on the strength of cultural and generational diversity.
- Take an active stance on issues affecting the community.
- Do not be afraid to be political.

Youth allies in the creative arts say:

- Use the realm of creativity to teach self-esteem.
- Allow young people to feel empowered by choosing projects that are focused and productive.
- Build on the process of teamwork when developing projects.
- Empower each young person by exploring issues of identity in an affirming setting. "Here, they get to be themselves," says Yvette Gomez.
- Be aware of the mentoring position inherent in working with young people.
- Turn negative labels into positive action. "We don't seek youth out under the assumption that they have a problem that we can solve," says Yvette. "We seek them out because they have a lot to say and need an opportunity to say it."

Youth allies who are cultural activists say:

- Learn to think in circular, non-linear terms.
- Do not be governed by time or by other limitations.
- Listen more than you speak: "In my culture, it is inappropriate to interrupt anyone, because we assume we all have something important to say," says Lynne LaPointe, who works within his Native American community as a cultural activist. "We must take the time to listen."
- Questions come easily if you let them.

Youth allies who are youth workers say:

- Create a cycle of caring.
- Be culturally accurate and invite appropriate input. "I always, always ask someone from that culture to speak, and I use my position to get them a space in which to do that," says Evelyn Juliussen. "I feel this is really important for young people, who desperately need to learn cultural truths in this age of intolerance."
- Seek cultural truth to combat intolerance.
- Be consistent and committed.
- Build relationships through valuing quality over quantity.

No matter what kind of youth ally you are, there are consistent principles of best practice that almost everyone can agree:

- Provide options, not ultimatums.
- Visualize yourself as the role model that you are.
- Provide the needed link between youth and systems.
- Be a consistent force in young people's lives.

See *Today's Heroes in the Classroom* and *Today's Heroes in the Community* for information on agencies and educators that involve youth.

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YOUTH ALLY PROFILE
ROBERT WOOLFOLK, PASTOR

"A sure way to lift yourself up is to help to lift someone else."

Booker T. Washington

Robert Woolfolk of Colorado is no stranger to change. As the pastor of Agape Christian Church in Denver, he has seen his community go through the trials and tribulations of the '70s, '80s and '90s, all the while working through faith and human effort to address serious social problems. In his programming for the community at large, he is responsible for making decisions that affect young people. His challenge, like many youth allies who may not work directly with youth all the time, is to be aware of the needs of youth as he makes overall programmatic decisions.

"You have to have multi-faceted service programs to meet the diversity of young people's needs," says Robert, detailing the numerous programs available to youth through his church. Most programs are based out of the church's Youth Outreach Center, and focus on helping kids stay out of trouble by providing opportunities to build skills and serve the community. "We have programs that run the entire year, some that run the academic year, and some that are only in the summer. We offer this variety because we learned over the years that kids need options to choose from, just like adults," says Robert.

A program he is particularly proud of is called "YouthWorks," which pairs at-risk youth with African-American businesses in the historic Black Business District in Denver. "It's great because the kids get to work with adults from our own culture, adults who are successful and whose businesses benefit the community," says Robert. Participants are placed in record shops, banks, radio stations, and florist shops, and work after school for ten hours per week for which they are paid a stipend. And when they are not at work, they are learning additional skills related to career development and making positive life choices.

"We're trying to teach kids how to have integrity and be disciplined and responsible," says Robert, who hopes they will apply their skills and develop their own entrepreneurial ventures. He encourages local businesses to hire the youth on a permanent basis after the program to help them expand their skills.

Program participants also learn about the importance of savings. Each participant is taken to Young American Bank to open a savings account at the beginning of the program and encouraged to save a portion of their paycheck each time they get paid. "Of course, it's up to them to keep saving even after the program is over, because we all know money is hard to come by these days," says Robert.

Another program run out of the Youth Outreach Center and sponsored by the church is an intergenerational tutoring program for third through fifth graders. High school students serve as tutors and mentors and learn skills while providing a much needed service. They are great role models, helping with homework and general supervision. There is positive reinforcement for both groups involved.

An aspect of the church Robert enjoys is the intergenerational interaction in all of the programs. "Elders have a role, teenagers have a role, and when they work together, they learn to understand and respect each other." His church is also multi-ethnic, serving two communities and two cultures in the same building. "One congregation is primarily English-speaking African-Americans, the other, Spanish-speaking Hispanics. Each congregation touches about 50 families, and we pride ourselves in dealing with the effects of racism on our lives," says Robert, who stresses love and respect of all people as part of his ministry, which deals with a multiplicity of

social, spiritual, educational and economic needs.

"We try to minister to the whole person, addressing people's needs so that they can take care of themselves, be self-sufficient," says Robert, whose ministries include employment, self-development, and career development including GED classes. These community outreach services help people respect themselves and others, which in turn helps make the community better.

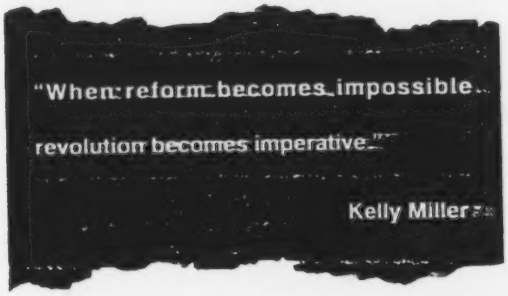
Robert is no stranger to community activism either, taking a community organizing approach towards issues affecting youth in his congregation and the surrounding community. An issue that has exacerbated community members was the poor police response to emergencies in the neighborhood. As part of the church's response to this situation, he began organizing youth and adults to have a press conference to improve relations between the police and the neighborhood. "Things have started to change, so people are feeling a little more empowered as a direct result of their activism," says Robert. "This is the heart of God's work."

The church and its programs boast a diversity of staff members, furthering its ability to reach a variety of age and cultural groups. "Our executive director is an African-American woman, our employment coordinator is an African-American man, and there is a Panamanian man of African descent who works here who also speaks Spanish, which is great for both communities!" says Robert. "The youth center is staffed by two elderly Korean women and two middle-aged Hispanic women. They are aided by a half-dozen teens who are part of the YouthWorks program."

Out of church, members of the congregation run a feeding program for the homeless, serving about 3,000 people in the Denver area. Robert also works in partnership with the public schools, helping in the after-school programs. And in response to the need for greater participation from parents of color, Robert addresses the cross-cultural misunderstandings that produce an intimidation factor by teaching parents how to interact with the school system and be advocates for their kids.

As communities make change, leadership develops, and Robert's work is a tribute to this principle in action. As a youth ally who works with parents, schools, youth, the business community, and the police, he shows us that you can be an ally to youth on many different levels. As a key decision maker in his community, he opens doors for young people by creating safer spaces for them to live, learn, and become active members of the community. And this link to adulthood is priceless.

YOUTH ALLY PROFILE
NAJMA NAZY'AT, YOUTH ENGAGED IN SERVICE AMBASSADOR



When service corps members in the Boston area need a mediator to negotiate major conflicts, they are likely to see Najma Nazy'at on the scene. As a Points of Light Foundation Youth Engaged in Service (YES) Ambassador working with the Massachusetts Youth Service Alliance, Najma's main mission is to advocate for young people in the state's 31 Americorps programs and 41 service-learning programs. "They keep me busy, but that's okay, because there is an incredible amount of need out there," says Najma, who describes her role as a resource, point person, and advocate for young people in service in Massachusetts.

Najma is one of 15 YES Ambassadors who serves an entire state, bridging the gap between youth and adults, and between service, service-learning, youth development and community action. Funded by The Points of Light Foundation, YES Ambassadors fulfill the Foundation's mission to increase the capacity of organizations to include youth in community service efforts aimed at solving serious social problems by providing these much needed links. And Najma is no exception to the rule. She advocates tirelessly on behalf of other young people in service so they can have their concerns addressed and needs met while providing valuable services to their communities.

In her work in Massachusetts, Najma finds herself working most closely with Team Leaders in the service corps, recognizing them to be a pivotal force. "Their role is crucial," she says. "Team leaders are deeply committed to the ideals of community service; they are very visionary. They are the most effective allies for their corps, and really exemplify the best in youth/adult partnerships. I support and nurture them through their nervousness about corps members not following through. I listen to them vent. I help them advocate for their corps when its necessary. Most of all, its gratifying to see them become more effective leaders with every new challenge, every new barrier overcome."

Unfortunately, the astronomical growth of service programs has left some gaps, and Najma is one of many advocates in the service field who hears a lot of frustration from young people in service. "I am concerned that they are not getting the proper training, education, or information when they begin, so they come into the service field disillusioned," says Najma. "They thought they were going to get more skills, more guidance, and access to higher education. Instead, they end up feeling used because they feel there is no place in the system where they can go to say 'Wait a minute. I'm not getting my needs met.'"

The enormity of the service field and the multitude of community needs has combined to create, in Najma's estimation, a situation where young people do a lot of work without the support they need to do it. What do we do to address this situation and be allied with youth who are increasingly disillusioned with the service field? "We need to hear them, help them, point them in the right direction," says Najma. "Development and empowerment are foundations on which to build youth power so that they can use their voices effectively. Otherwise, you have youth voice on paper, but not in reality, and that isn't good enough."

A true ally, Najma believes advocacy is the key to changing frustrations from hopelessness to thoughtful action. "When I'm advocating for corps members who find themselves on the verge of getting kicked out of their program, for example, I listen to their experiences and perspectives. At the same time, I try to give them information, try to fill in the missing pieces that are keeping them from understanding how to affect

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the system, and subsequently, their situation," says Najma. "Young people need to be able to affect the systems that are in power to really address their needs. So that's where I come in; questioning, listening, training, mediating, giving information. After I've helped them plan and strategize, I step out of the way, and let them process on their own. Hopefully, they'll come up with a solution and act on it."

In terms of her own work experience and philosophical outlook, Najma finds herself troubled by the rhetoric of empowerment in the service field, and sees this as different from the reality of tokenism. "The service field is different from other arenas, like school for example, where you have to work hard to receive recognition and be praised," says Najma. "In this field, you can be anyone who may or may not have done something, and be put in front of the cameras or legislators to represent youth voice. Young people are vulnerable to this kind of tokenism, and at the same time, they are looked upon to fix whole school systems and revamp whole neighborhoods without the proper guidance or information."

Given all of the challenges inherent in changing systems to be more responsive to human needs, how do we more forward and harness our collective energy? "Teaching young people to interact with systems is what it's all about," says Najma. "To me, that's the key to effective advocacy; that's the role of a youth ally. We have to hook young people up with adults who have decision-making responsibility. We need to show them how to follow up with a call, how to let legislators know they vote."

As the only youth advocate in her statewide office, Najma finds herself asking a lot of questions to facilitate this process. She asks of young people: What can you do to be an effective member of your community? Do you have real connections to your community? Are you getting these through your service corps experience, or are you finding them elsewhere? And she asks of adults: Why are your expectations of young people so low? What can we do to put as much energy into youth and their development as we do into grant writing and general organizational maintenance?

By showing young people how to be critical observers and giving them information on which to act, allies provide the missing link between thinking and doing. "It takes more than shovels to clean a dump site," says Najma. "It takes statistics, too."

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An important aspect of every youth ally's experience has been the ability to build relationships with youth. While these relationships are often organic, there are things you can do to build these relationships. In this section we have provided some tips on building relationships with youth and some activities you can use to build relationships with groups of youth.

While it is important to note that these activities may be helpful in bringing out power dynamics and stylistic differences in youth/adult relationships, the most effective way to build these relationships is to do meaningful work together. Concrete activities, like planning events, writing letters to Senators, having community roundtables, and participating in empowerment trainings allow youth to find their voices and adults to show their commitment to developing meaningful relationships.

By working on projects that are needed in the community, youth and adults learn to relate to each other while being engaged in a process that has a life of its own. This process, often referred to in experiential education as the "action-reflection cycle" involves four steps:

- training: team-building, initiatives, building a relational foundation;
- planning: developing the service project, dividing tasks, discussing strategies;
- action: doing the work together, meeting community members, getting things done;
- reflection: talking about what happened, what it meant, and what to do next.

An easy way to remember the stages of processing is the phrase "what, so what, now what" used by educators familiar with service-learning.

By working towards mutually established goals together, youth and adults learn how to function in teams. They learn how to be partners. And this partnership is a powerful remedy to intergenerational conflicts and misunderstandings.

Tips For Building Relationships With Youth

Building relationships is not easy. It takes time and it takes patience, but as all of the youth allies profiled agree, the rewards are immeasurable. Just remember, if you commit to being a youth ally, make sure you have the time, the energy, and the support to do it. As you work with youth, keep in mind the following tips:

- listen...really listen to young people
- ask challenging questions
- reflect on your own experiences as a young person
- provide young people with the information, training and support they need to succeed
- do not stereotype young people; do not blame all young people for the actions of one
- be patient and have the courage to set aside your fears
- be straight up and explain where you are coming from
- hold young people accountable for their decisions and actions
- be personal and share yourself

For other activities you can conduct with your staff related to youth readiness, see *Today's Heroes in the Community*.

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And remember, sometimes its the little things we do that signal to young people we are their allies, e.g. when we involve them in our processes, when we hold meetings they are invited to at times they can come, or when we consider transportation issues.

Activities to Build Relationships with Youth

Listed below are some tried and true activities used in trainings to build trust and a sense of teamwork. Use these activities to highlight power dynamics in your partnerships with youth, learn more about young people, share yourself with others, and stimulate discussions. How you choose to integrate these activities into your program development depends on your needs and ultimately, on your goals.

Setting Groundrules

Explain the importance of creating groundrules, mention that they are best when kept simple and few in number. Ask people to think about a group they have been a part of that worked well together. Brainstorm why they worked well. Have a brief discussion of what people brainstormed. Then have people suggest ground rules. Write them up on a big piece of paper. Have people discuss each rule. When you feel sufficient discussion has taken place ask everyone who feels they can support these groundrules raise their hands. Keep the paper posted somewhere visible so that the group can see them whenever they are together.

Back to Back

Get a partner and stand back-to-back linking arms. Sit down and then try to stand up keeping your arms linked. Once you have accomplished this as a pair, link with other pairs and try and stand up with groups of four, six, etc. If you want to intensify or highlight issues of communication vs. time, put a time limit on accomplishing the goal. Low-risk activity, great for icebreakers, beginnings, laughter, team-building.

For other activities you can do with young people see *Helping Young People Become Today's Heroes* activity and reflection sheets.

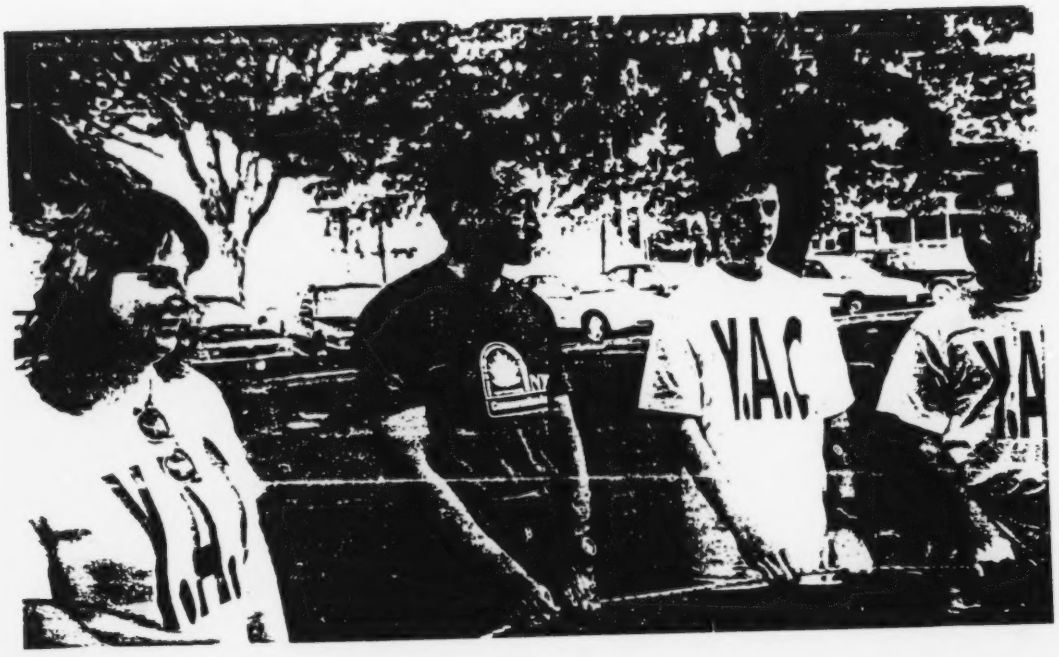
Human Knot

Work in groups not less than five or more than fifteen. Grasp one hand each of two different people, one next to you, and one across from you. Try to get untangled without letting go. Medium-risk activity (be sensitive to issues of physical closeness), great to highlight cooperation, effort, making the impossible possible, building a sense of accomplishment and teamwork.

Stand Where You Stand

This is a game of opinions. Develop a series of five to ten statements that explore issues of choice, opinion, or action. These statements should be only one sentence long, and be relevant to issues you might be facing in your community and/or project. Example: "Young people in this community don't care about anyone but themselves." Once questions are ready, designate a game leader to give directions. This leader will be responsible for setting a tone of respect, and an expectation for listening.

Divide room into a spectrum of opinion. One end of the spectrum is agree, the other end is disagree. Leave a space in the middle for no opinion either way. Make gradual positions as well: partially agree, partially disagree, strongly agree, strongly disagree, etc. This allows for dialogue between both subtle and extreme differences of opinion. This game is most effective when the questions range and progress from low-risk to high-risk issues.



After establishing groundrules for respect, and explaining the mechanics of the game, read question one. Say "STAND WHERE YOU STAND" and allow participants to move to their positions. Ask someone from each position to say why they chose to stand at that position. After hearing different statements, ask if anyone wants to switch positions. If they do, ask them why they did. Proceed to next question and follow same format. Medium to high-risk activity involving sharing oneself, learning about subtleties of different perspectives, and allowing for a diversity of opinion. It is highly recommended that this activity be played after a group has had time to build trust.

Circle Game

This game explores issues of identity. In the middle of bright paper, have each person place a circle large enough to write one's name in. Draw six lines outward from this circle, forming a sun. Draw smaller circles at the end of each line. Discuss identity—what it means, different identities people have, why they have them, etc. Fill each circle with an identity that you relate to. Once completed, share this in smaller groups. In large group, ask if anyone would like to start in sharing their circles. As people begin to share, encourage everyone to take a turn. Medium-risk activity highlighting cultural diversity, invisible identities, pride in one's strengths.

Blind Square

While blind folded, ask a group of 8+ to form a perfect square (or another shape) using a determined length of rope. The rope should be at least 20 feet long. Start with all participants standing in a line and holding on to the rope. The participants may not let go of the rope with either hand during the activity. Medium-risk activity which highlights communication and teamwork.

Victory Jump

Use this initiative at the end of a training session or at the end of meetings, etc., to highlight teamwork. Use a large rope as a jump rope. Hold at each end. Instruct everyone to go to one side of the rope. The object is to get everyone to the other side without touching the rope, because if one person touches it, then everyone has to go back. Start turning, watching to see if the dynamics shift from competitive to cooperative. If

everyone gets stuck in the competitive mode, stop the game and ask what we can do to make sure everyone gets over the rope successfully. Once a strategy has been decided upon and attitudes shift, proceed. Very fun, medium to high-risk activity to be used as a high-energy, high-spirited conclusion.

Weaving the Web

Used to build inspiration and unity among a group. Participants sit or stand in a circle. Ask someone to volunteer to begin the activity. The first person with either a ball of string or roll of toilet paper answers a questions like "What qualities or talents are you going to contribute to the program." After the first person answers, they hold onto the end of the string, and toss the ball of string to another person in the circle. Repeat this process until everyone in the circle has answered the question. When it is complete there should be a web connecting everyone together. Have the group discuss the symbolism of the web and how it relates to their situation.

M and M Game

Have pairs lay down on the ground on their stomachs facing each other. Ask them to prop themselves up on their elbows and to grasp right hand to right hand (similar to arm wrestling, but do not use the term arm wrestling). Tell them the goal is to get as many points as possible in a specified time (10 seconds). They will receive an M and M every time they touch the back of their partners hand to the floor. Once the allotted time is up ask everyone how many M and Ms they earned. Ask the people who only earned one M and M what they did. Ask the people who earned a lot of M and Ms what they did. Demonstrates assumptions people make (many pairs assume it is arm-wrestling and resist each other) and how working together can create a win-win situation.

Stand Up/Sit Down

Ask a series of questions. Everyone who answers yes stands up, while everyone who answers no or chooses not to answer remains seated. Questions may range from low-risk to high-risk depending on the readiness of the group. Sample questions: low-risk—Who has been to New Jersey? Who has worked at McDonalds? Who is left handed? and high-risk—Who knows someone who is in a gang? Who has committed a crime? Who has betrayed a friend? This can be a great activity to get to know people (low-risk), as well as an

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activity which promotes disclosure. It is important to discuss confidentiality prior to this activity, particularly when using high-risk questions.

Tips for Facilitators:

- Be clear about your goals for each activity.
- Know your audience, e.g. don't use high-risk activities with a group of people who have never worked together before.
- Make sure the space and environment are adequate for the activities you have planned.
- Be prepared. Think about what discussion certain activities might bring up.
- For more tips, see "Tips for Facilitators" in *Helping Young People Become Today's Heroes.*
- Have fun!

Switch-Swatch

Have two people stand facing each other. Tell them that their goal is to defeat the argument of the other. They are not to listen to each other, but to talk over each other. Pick a topic that has two sides e.g. ice cream is better than candy bars and assign each a side of the argument. Tell them they are to argue their assigned position until you say "switch." When you say "switch" they have to argue the other side of the argument. This activity highlights the kind of communication that is not productive in solving problems. This can be a high-risk activity. Use it in groups that already work together and know each other and use topics that are not divisive.

Count to 10

Have a group of ten stand in a circle. Tell the group they must count to ten, out loud, with one person saying no more than one number, and no more than one person talking at a time. You may not make any other sounds and the person on either side of someone who just called out a number may not call out the next number. If two people speak at the same time, the group must start again at one. The group keeps trying until they get it. This activity helps people learn how to listen to each other and how to provide time for individuals to speak and share.

These initiatives are but a few that have been developed. Check your local library or contact service organizations to see if they have copies of books detailing appropriate use of "new games" and initiatives. Other resources include:

Frank Aycox, *Games We Should Play in School*, (CA: Front Row Experience), 1985.

Andrew Fluegelman, *The New Games Book*, (NY: Dolphin Books), 1976.

Andrew Fluegelman, *More New Games*, (NY: Dolphin Books), 1981.

Karl Rohnke, *Cowsails and Cobras: A Guide to Initiative, Ropes Courses and Adventure Curriculum*, (MA: Project Adventure), 1977.

Karl Rohnke, *Cowsails and Cobras II*, (revised edition), (IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.), 1989

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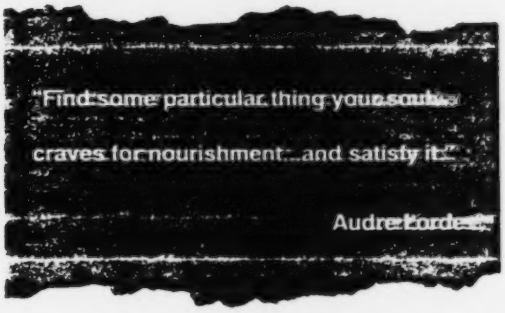
YVETTE GOMEZ, COMMUNITY ARTS OUTREACH COORDINATOR



Yvette Gomez knows how to reach young people in her community who need a place to be themselves. She knows through her work, but she also knows because she was one of them. As Outreach Coordinator for Drama Divas, a writing-into-performance workshop for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth 21 and younger in San Francisco, she provides a safe space for other youth to express themselves through the arts while learning valuable job skills. The program specifically focuses on the needs of youth of color, and is the only youth theater training troupe of its kind in California. It trains youth in every aspect of theater production—from technical aspects like lights and sound to promotion and performance. And through grants from the San Francisco Mayor's Youth and their Families Children's Fund, Drama Divas is able to provide a stipend to all participants under 18 while they learn computer skills and aspects of theater administration.

"It's a job for them and for me, but it's also fun," says Yvette, 21, who entered the program as a participant four years ago and has now moved into being a program coordinator, serving as an advocate for other youth. "They are not sought out under the assumption that they have a problem that we can solve, but rather that they have a lot to say and need an opportunity to say it."

Through Drama Divas, participants collaborate with other young people and write about their lives, a practice that reinforces that their lives are worthwhile. "Their work is good. Not Shakespeare, but it's theater, it's literature, it's real," Yvette says. "And here, they get to be themselves."

The participants, who are primarily Latino and African-American youth from the Bay Area, are responsible not only for the content of their productions, but for all the steps it takes to get on stage. "This gives them a sense of accountability, both personally and in a group. Teamwork, all through a creative focused presentation. It's a beautiful process to be a part of," says Yvette.

What roles does an outreach coordinator play in this process? Yvette was quick to name several, including supervisor, teacher, peer, friend, advocate, ally, confidante. "The young people in the program do my job for me, really. I just take on roles as needed to encourage, support, provide feedback," she says. "They are responsible for the program's success as much as I am. It's discouraging when participants have to choose between work and recreation. Here, they don't have to choose. They get to have a good time while learning something, and that's a process I can respect."

To be a good ally, Yvette asserts, one needs to be aware of the mentoring position inherent in working with younger people. In her own experience, she had mentors who played the same role with her, allowing her to grow in response to the belief placed in her that she was worthy of trust and responsibility. A good ally also gives opinions and options as opposed to ultimatums. He or she also knows when to give a young person a jump start—that extra push out of the comfort zone.

One of the things Yvette has been keenly aware of in her work is the need for youth allies to concentrate on breaking kids of the habit of apologizing for themselves. "It is really prevalent among youth of color to have very low self-esteem," she says. "We (at Drama Divas) try to break kids of the habit of expect-

ing the worst of themselves. We tell them—and show them through the creative process—that they have something important to contribute to the world."

What are the challenges involved in working with lesbian, bisexual, and gay youth of color in theater in light of the ugly realities of racism, ageism and homophobia? "We have to be extremely conscious of where, what, and how we perform. It's stressful not knowing what response the audience will have," Yvette says. "I remember several occasions when we had to screen our work before it was allowed to be shown. As a youth ally, I had to think of how this was affecting the youth in the program, knowing that they have a need to create uncensored. I usually ended up not letting them perform in spaces that had a high level of distrust from the start, because it created such a tense, unsupportive atmosphere for the participants in the program."

Yvette is clear to state that she understands in general there is a need in nonprofits to create a supportive environment for young people, both in the creative arts and other arenas. "We have to make sure that the work that they are doing is useful, legitimate. We need to learn to share the mundane tasks, not just give them to the 'new kids on the block,' so to speak."

The highlights for youth workers at Drama Divas center around the affirmation involved in the creative process, and the fact that everyone can be their whole selves in one place. Discussions and explorations of race, class, family, and gender run through every production. Yvette finds that the assumption and reality of safety around issues of sexuality allows participants and staff to focus on all aspects of their existence. "There isn't always a need to talk about gayness when everyone is gay," she laughs. "We treat it as the norm and take it from there."

Every time that participants produce something, every time they are affirmed, every time they feel really good about the work that they've shared, Yvette knows she is doing her work well. "Creativity is a very liberating force," she says. "I'm working for the day when every kid in the Bay Area, every kid in California, every kid around the world can say, 'Hey! Look what I've created! I feel good about this!' and know that they're worth something. That will be a great day indeed."

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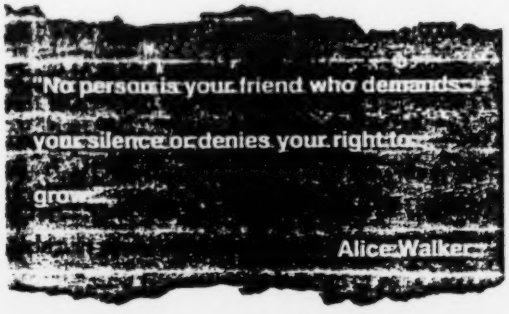
YOUTH ALLY PROFILE
ROMONA SAFREE, FIRST GRADE TEACHER



At the Southside Family School in Minnesota, younger students have just as many options as their older peers, thanks to individualized curriculum and teachers like Romona Safree who make it a priority to meet the needs of each of their students. Established as a Freedom School twenty years ago, Family School (as its called affectionately) is a private, nonprofit elementary school which maintains an open school philosophy but has changed its curricular approach.

"We decided that we need to make sure we are providing students with basic skills, as well as lots of choices," says Romona, who teaches first grade at the school. The way each day is structured now accounts for that shift. In the mornings, students take classes in basic skills. And in the afternoons, students can choose geography, human expressions, arts and crafts, physical education, or physical science. Students can choose one of three options for their elective structure. They can choose "Clubs," which are electives that rotate on a monthly basis. Their second option is "Classorama," in which they choose electives on a daily basis. And if neither of these options appeal to students, then they can choose "Inquiry," which rotates every three weeks within the school to look at different subject areas taught by different teachers. "Inquiry allows students to get exposed to a variety of teaching styles and techniques. We often think of the poor teacher who is stuck with a student she/he does not get along with, but what about the student? They need choices too, because the negative side of the equation for the student is not being exposed to the diversity of teachers," says Romona.

The choices and variety at Family School keep both students and teachers on their toes. The basic premise of Family School is that basic academic skills plus choice plus experience with a variety of teachers equals well-rounded students and empowered teachers. "Teachers here have complete autonomy to create age-appropriate and skill-appropriate curriculum. And this is much more challenging than following a preconceived lesson plan developed by someone else." says Romona who like her colleagues does not use curriculum from the public schools. In a classroom of third and fourth graders, a teacher could be dealing with seven skill levels. This is why, at Family School, they have come to see the effectiveness of developing individualized curriculum.

They have also seen the need to cater to the whole child, to understand their social, emotional, familial and intellectual needs and how these needs affect their learning. "We are definitely child advocates," Romona asserts, "and this advocacy goes beyond our jobs. It's being committed to helping kids feel good about themselves, and addressing issues that get in the way of their positive development. Whatever the child needs, we try to make it happen. If the family is experiencing economic difficulties, we find services to help them. If we don't, then we haven't fulfilled our mission to be family and community centered, which is the best thing about Family School."

Their mission statement is based on a strong commitment to create a learning environment that is free of societal ills. "We strive to build an atmosphere free of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. We honor diverse cultural identities, shared decision-making and problem-solving. And we encourage—and thrive with—volunteer participation by parents and community people." Romona explains. "We use the community as a classroom, and have several field trips a week."

Community service takes on many forms at Family School, which has a strong emphasis on social justice. This curriculum teaches students that they have power, that they can make a difference in the

world. One of the most comprehensive social justice/community excursions involved traveling to the South on a "Freedom Ride" on which students get to explore the history and reality of racial prejudice in the United States. Some of Romona's fondest memories are of her students being champions for justice, taking the curriculum to heart and putting it into action.

"I remember one day when I was teaching the third grade elective, I left the classroom for a moment," she says, "and I came back to a situation I didn't expect! Apparently, one of the new students was using negative language in reference to one of the African-American students in the class. When I got back, I saw that his classmates had crowded around him, saying, 'That's not right! You can't call him that! Those words are hurtful!' I had to let them know that it's good to speak out against racism, but that it's important to be respectful. It's those subtle lessons that make teaching in this context rewarding."

The basic rule of "respect for self and others" goes a long way at Family School. "We want kids to grow up to be independent thinkers, so we give them room to make mistakes. And when they do, we give them a way out, and tools to improve," Romona says.

Romona's commitment to advocate for her students goes beyond the classroom walls. Her work as a youth ally encompasses this. "Every kid in our school has teachers' phone numbers, and they know they are cared about in and out of school. They also know that even if we disagree, I'm not going to stop caring for them," she says. An ally, she feels, must be someone a young person can trust.

The teacher who is a youth ally knows how to judge if her student is progressing, and if not, what needs to be done. An ally figures out the root issues and tries to address them as barriers to progress. An ally also asks questions, as opposed to simply looking for answers. "We do this to let our students know they are cared about, that they are important enough to worry about," Romona says of her advocacy.

What are the roots of Romona's commitment to youth advocacy? It starts with her own childhood. "When I was a kid, I told myself that I was going to let other kids know I cared. I was kind of like the neighborhood Pied Piper!" she says. "Whenever something happened, kids would come looking for me to tell me all about it. I think they sought me out because they knew they would be safe with me. I always heard, 'You're the only one who really loves me!' They knew I'd listen, no matter what. And it's the same today in Family School as it was back then in my neighborhood; I listen to my students, no matter what."

Teachers at Family School also listen to parents. In fact, parents comprise 100 percent of their School Board. This creates a very supportive organizational environment for a youth ally. "We are able to teach and advocate in an atmosphere of collaboration, because all parties are working together in the best interest of the child," Romona says. "There's always lots of discussion, a friendly atmosphere, and a sense of community among the teachers. The best word for this organization? 'Home.' I feel capable, respected, and confident that I'm doing something that makes a difference."

When asked what principles guide her work as a youth ally, Romona listed quite a few. Among them, she cited her driving force: to do her part to raise healthy kids for a healthy world. Romona also turned old clichés on their heads. "I believe in promoting the opposite of 'Kids should be seen and not heard.' KIDS SHOULD BE SEEN AND HEARD!!" She continues, "Kids should be seen, heard, nurtured, guided and trusted. And if I can't help in this process, I try not to do any harm either." Wise words from a wise teacher.

Given her deep commitment to raising freedom-loving students, what are some highlights of Romona's life work? "Seeing students come into themselves—that's got to be the best reward for teaching," she says. "Like when a student starts to read, learns to decode what they consider nonsense and make sense of words for the first time—WOW! We're talking about drastic changes here. It's also equally amazing to see the first group of students I worked with six years ago graduating. I say to myself, 'I've been a part of raising these kids, I've seen them grow into who they are.' And that is phenomenal."

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RESOURCES

A number of resources were pulled together to assemble this guide. Some are concrete and easily referenced, others are "handouts" floating around in files from conferences and workshops gone by. Credit is given wherever possible, and we extend our apologies to anyone we may have missed.

Keep in mind there are a number of "experts" in our field—people everywhere who are doing a great job building service-learning programs as a way for young people to learn. Service-learning is full of "borrowed material," and we graciously thank those who have shared their experiences. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," they say. Well, imitate away... Here are some of the more tangible resources you may find helpful.

Local Resources

- Volunteer Center
- United Way
- Youth Organizations
- Library
- Junior League
- Urban League
- Special Olympics
- Scouts
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- YMCA/YWCA
- 4-H Clubs
- SADD
- Nursing Homes
- Hospitals
- Humane Society
- Churches
- Local schools and universities

... the list goes on. If these organizations do not have your answers, they can probably direct you to someone who will.

Publications

The Adventure of Adolescence: Middle School Students and Community Service, by Catherine Z. Rolzinski, 1990. (Washington, DC: Youth Service America). Case studies of community and school based programs for middle school students.

Building Bridges: Teens in Community Service, by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Minneapolis, MN: RespecTeen, 1992). This brochure summarizes the value of teen involvement in community service. Available free of charge for use in workshops, conferences, or by individuals by calling (800) 888-3820.

Children as Volunteers: Preparing for Community Service (revised edition), by Susan J. Ellis, Anne Weisbord, and Katherine H. Noyes (Philadelphia, PA: Energize, 1991). If you want to include elementary-aged children in service, this booklet is a valuable guide.

Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community Service and Public Service, Volumes I-III, edited by Jane C. Kendall and associates (Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, 1990). This three-volume collection of articles and case studies is indispensable for anyone serious about understanding the history, theory, and practice of service-learning. Volume I focuses on theory; Volume II on practice; and Volume III on resources.

Creating and Managing Partnerships for Service-Learning: A Guide for Service-Learning Coordinators, by Jim Pitofsky (Alexandria, VA: National Association of Partners in Education, 1994). This self-guiding manual takes you through awareness, needs assessment, goals and objectives, program design, partnership management, and other key issues in a service-learning partnership.

The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs, by Marlene Wilson (Boulder, CO: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976). A classic text on managing volunteer programs, including how to lead, motivate, plan, recruit, supervise, and evaluate in volunteer programs.

Everyone Wins When Youth Serve: Building Agency/School Partnerships for Service-Learning, by Euegene Roehlkepartain (Washington, DC: The Points of Light Foundation, 1995). Highlights the power of creating service-learning opportunities for youth in agencies. Discusses service-learning, benefits of involving youth, agency concerns related to creating service-learning opportunities and first steps agencies can take to develop these kind of opportunities.

Facts and Faith: A Status Report on Youth Service, by Anne C. Lewis (Washington, DC: Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, 1988). This research report is an excellent summary of the impact, practice, and promise of service-learning.

Giving and Volunteering Among American Teenagers 12 to 17 Years of Age, analyzed by Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray S. Weitzman (Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 1992). Based on a survey by the Gallup Organization, this research report examines the practices, motivations, and experiences of young people who volunteer and donate to charitable causes.

Growing Hope: A Sourcebook on Integrating Youth Service into the School Curriculum, edited by Rich Willits Cairns and James C. Kielsmeier (St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council, 1991). This collection of the "best of the best" in service-learning is a key resource for anyone interested in service-learning. It explores the principles and practices, as well as numerous case studies from schools across the country.

A How to Guide to Reflection: Adding Cognitive Learning to Community Service Programs, by Harry C. Silcox (Philadelphia, PA: Brighton Press, 1993). Silcox presents a clear framework for understanding different types of reflection and their role in service-learning.

A Kid's Guide to Social Action, by Barbara A. Lewis (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991). Give this book to youth who lead your service projects! It not only gives practical suggestions of ways youth can get involved, but it inspires with dozens of stories of how youth have made a difference in their communities.

Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs, by James C. Fisher and Kathleen M. Cole (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1993). This general text details the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to manage volunteers, based on the Association for Volunteer Administration Certification Competencies. The general guidelines can be applied to youth service-learning.

Learning by Giving: K-8 Service-Learning Curriculum Guide, by Rich Cairn with Theresa L. Coble (St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council, 1993). This binder overviews the elements of service-learning and its impact, then presents the nuts and bolts of building a service-learning program.

Learning Through Service, by Kate McPherson (Seattle, WA: Project Servant Leadership, 1989). A 24-page introduction to the concepts and practical issues in service-learning from one of the experts.

Maryland's Best Practices: An Improvement Guide for School-Based Service-Learning (Baltimore, MD: Maryland Student Service Alliance, 1994). Maryland is the only state to require service-learning for graduation. This guide, based on what schools have learned, provides practical ideas for engaging young people in school-based service.

The Power and Potential of Youth in Service to Communities, by Paula J. Beugen (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Office of Volunteer Services, 1993). This manual presents the basic issues in youth community service from an agency perspective, including many examples of service programs in Minnesota.

Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning, by Ellen Porter Honnet and Susan Poulsen. The Johnson Foundation, 1989, Racine, WI, or call (414) 681-3328 for additional copies.

Profiles in Service: A Handbook of Service-Learning Program Design Models, by Brenda Urke and Maddy Wegner (St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council, 1993). This handbook presents five detailed case studies of service-learning partnerships as well as lessons learned from these efforts.

Route to Reform: Service-Learning and School Improvement (St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council, 1994). A compilation of more than 50 descriptions of effective service-learning projects, grades K-8, from Generator School and summer WalkAbout teachers.

Schools and Communities: Creating Places of Learning (Washington, DC: The Points of Light Foundation, 1993). This booklet introduces the concept of service-learning and how to create a service-learning environment in communities.

Volunteer Community Service Catalog (Washington, DC: The Points of Light Foundation, 1996). This catalog is packed with over 150 books related to non-profit and volunteer management, fundraising, and developing boards. Plus the catalog includes items for volunteer recruitment and recognition. To order contact The Points of Light Foundation at 1-800-272-8306.

Youth Service: A Guidebook for Developing and Operating Effective Programs, by Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin (Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 1987). These 72 pages are packed with the wisdom and experience of two of the pioneers in service-learning. Suggested worksheets and exercises make it a particularly useful planning guide.

Activism 2000 Project
Information USA, INCL
PO Box E, Kensington, MD 20895
(301) 942-6303

Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL)
1511 K St. NW, suite 307
Washington DC, 20005
(202) 637-7004

Constitutional Rights Foundation
601 S. Kingsley Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90005
(213) 487-5590

Corporation for National Service
1201 New York Ave NW
Washington, DC 20525
(202) 606-5000

Independent Sector
1828 L St. NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 223-8100

Maryland Student Service Alliance
200 West Baltimore St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 767-0358

National Association of Partners in Education
Ideals Project
209 Madison St., Suite 401
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

National Helpers Network, Inc.
245 5th Ave, Suite 1705
New York, NY 10016-8728
(212) 679-2482

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
University of Minnesota
College of Education
R-290 Vocational and Technical Building
1954 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108
1-800-808-Serv
E-mail: serv @ maroon.tc.umn.edu

National Society for Experiential Education
3509 Haworth Drive, Suite 207
Raleigh, NC 27609
(919) 787-3263

National Youth Leadership Council
1910 West County Road B
St. Paul, MN 55113-1337
(612) 631-3672

The Points of Light Foundation
Youth and Education Outreach
1737 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 223-9186

Quest International
1984 Coffman Rd.
Newark, OH 43055
(800) 837-2081

Youth Service America
1101 15th St. NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 296-2992

Youth Volunteer Corps of America
6310 Lamar Ave., Suite 125
Overland Park, KS 66202-4247
(913) 432-9822

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The *Today's Heroes* project is a partnership of the Hitachi Foundation, The National Youth Leadership Council and The Points of Light Foundation.

In November of 1985, Hitachi, Ltd. of Tokyo established The Hitachi Foundation in Washington, D.C. as a nonprofit, philanthropic organization with a mission to promote social responsibility through effective participation in a global society. With a $28 million endowment, the Foundation maintains a $2.5 million annual giving program, making grants nationally to U.S. nonprofit organizations for projects in education, community development, and global citizenship. Since 1990, the Foundation has awarded grants totalling more than $15 million.

The Hitachi Foundation

The Hitachi Foundation
1509 22nd Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20037-1073
(202) 457-0588

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Founded in 1983, the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is a Minnesota based, national nonprofit organization which works to integrate youth leadership and service learning practices into elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools. The mission of NYLC is to engage and connect young people to communities and schools through innovations in learning, leadership, service and public policy.

NYLC

The National Youth
Leadership Council
1910 West County Road B
Roseville, MN 55113
(612) 631-3672

...

The Points of Light Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to engaging the American public in volunteer community service. The Foundation's mission is to engage more people more effectively in volunteer community service to help solve serious social problems. Through its Youth and Education Outreach, the Foundation seeks to make this mission a reality for young people between the ages of 5 and 25.

POINTS OF LIGHT FOUNDATION

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